

In the Theater of Counterrevolution: Loyalist Association and Conservative Opinion in the 1790s

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Conservative movements have generally played a negative role in accounts of the history of political expression in Britain during the period of the French Revolution. Where E. P. Thompson and others on the Left tended to identify radicalism with the disenfranchised and with a struggle for the rights of free expression and public assembly,¹ conservative activists have been associated with state campaigns of political repression and legal interference. Indeed, conservatism in this period is typically conceived in negative terms, as antiradicalism or counterrevolution. If this has been the view of hostile commentators, it is consistent with a more sympathetic mythology that sees nothing novel about the conservative principles that emerged in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.² They represent an establishment response to alien challenges. Even where conservatives set about mobilizing the resources of print, opinion, and assembly in a constructive fashion, the reputation for interference has endured. John Reeves's Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers is a useful case in

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¹ See, e.g., E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966); Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796–1821* (Oxford, 1982).

² For the emergence of the modern conservative position in this period, see James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1993).

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point, since it managed in its brief but enterprising history to combine fierce anti-Jacobinism with the later eighteenth century's rising tide of voluntary civic activism. The association came together at the Crown and Anchor Tavern when a group of self-professed "private men" decided "to form ourselves into an ASSOCIATION" and announced their intentions through the major London newspapers in November and December of 1792. The original committee then called on others "to make similar exertions in their respective neighbourhoods," forming energetic local associations that would be linked by regular correspondence with the central London committee.³ In this way, the loyalist movement grew with astonishing speed. By the early months of 1793, it included perhaps a thousand local affiliates (the London committee claimed over two thousand),⁴ all engaged in the business of corresponding with other societies, circulating conservative pamphlets, issuing loyal addresses, and exposing the threat of Jacobin conspiracy. Though the association maintained a high public profile in all these areas, its repressive legal campaign against the radical press and the London Corresponding Society has attracted the most notice. According to one historian of extraparliamentary organization, "the Association, with Reeves in command, had one object. Its mission was repression. . . . The campaign against subversion was swift, vindictive, and unrelenting."⁵

Yet even a "one object" assessment of the association need not exclude various means. Loyalists were flexible in conceiving their own activity, and they endorsed approaches to public enterprise that ranged from repression and opposition ("against") through conservation ("preserving") to more autotelic energy ("exertions") and even a kind of self-invention ("to form ourselves into"). The complex historical possibilities expressed by conservative activism have been more fully acknowledged in recent years by H. T. Dickinson, Ian Christie, Robert R. Dozier, and others who have sought to rehabilitate the intellectual credibility and popular appeal of a loyalist defense of the British state in the

³ Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, *Association Papers* (London, 1793), pt. 1, *Proceedings of the Association*, no. 1, pp. 5, 10.

⁴ For estimates of the strength of the movement, see Austin Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792–3," *Historical Journal* 4 (1961): 61–62; Robert R. Dozier, *For King, Constitution and Country: The English Loyalists and the French Revolution* (Lexington, Ky., 1983), pp. 60–64; H. T. Dickinson, "Popular Loyalism in Britain in the 1790s," in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (Oxford, 1990), pp. 517–20. For the London Association's own estimate, see *Association Papers*, preface, p. v.

⁵ Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769–1793* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 261.

1790s.⁶ This body of scholarship clearly suggests a less negative understanding of conservatism with respect to public opinion and print expression, in part through the basic claim that radical discontent was put down not by extreme forms of state repression ('Pitt's reign of terror') but rather by relatively ordinary mechanisms of public deliberation and civic enterprise. In defending "the strength of conservative ideas and opinion," Dickinson proposes that "the radicals were defeated by the force of their opponents' arguments and by the climate of conservative opinion among the politically conscious, not simply by the recourse to repressive measures and the forces of order."⁷ The credible presence of antirevolutionary sentiment in public life is reinforced, in this view, by the fact that conservative principles, broadly understood as a resistance to social change and a commitment to British constitutional traditions, were in place well before the outbreak of the French Revolution.⁸ So too were the practices of civic association and public expression through which loyalism took hold, and even historians not committed to a defense of conservatism have identified enterprises like Reeves's association and the later volunteer movement with "a growing civic-mindedness and voluntary endeavour" that, far from being narrowly repressive in its aims and effect, "contributed significantly to the building of civic cultures in a period when these were starting to shed their old exclusiveness and becoming more public and self-consciously communal."⁹

Yet the case for a more sympathetic treatment of loyalism has its critics. Revisionist claims about "the genuine popularity of the loyalist cause among all ranks in society,"¹⁰ and about the credibility and persua-

⁶ Central expressions of this defense of the conservative position can be found in H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1979); Ian R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford, 1984); Dozier, *For King, Constitution and Country*; H. T. Dickinson, "Introduction: The Impact of the French Revolution and the French Wars, 1789–1815," and "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789–1815," in *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789–1815*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (London, 1989), pp. 1–19, 103–25; Frank O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' Reaction to the French Revolution, 1789–1815," in Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the French Revolution*, pp. 21–37; Dickinson, "Popular Loyalism in Britain," pp. 503–33.

⁷ Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 271–72.

⁸ O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' Reaction," pp. 36–37; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, p. 272.

⁹ J. E. Cookson, "The English Volunteer Movement of the French Wars, 1793–1815: Some Contexts," *Historical Journal* 32 (1989): 868. For other accounts of the traditions behind loyal association and its relative strength with respect to radicalism, see Dickinson, "Introduction," p. 10; Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, pp. 176–77; Christie, *Stress and Stability*, pp. 36–37; Black, *The Association*.

¹⁰ Dickinson, "Popular Loyalism in Britain," p. 517.

siveness of arguments against reform, have come in for particular scrutiny. In a wide-ranging response to Dickinson and others, John Dinwiddy has argued that while “in some areas the conservatives were able to counter radical arguments quite cogently, there were other areas where they had to resort either to evasiveness, or to misrepresentation, or to some fairly transparent special pleading.”¹¹ Challenges have also been mounted to the idea that counting up the sheer number of tracts published on each side of the revolution controversy reveals a conservative advantage in public opinion, and this has led to a more critical treatment of the mechanics of loyalist expression. Dinwiddy makes the case along the axis of production as well as reception, observing that “many writers on the conservative side were place-holders or place-hunters,” and that “many conservative tracts, especially at the popular end of the spectrum, were purchased in bulk for free distribution,” so that “their extensive circulation said far more about upper-class anxiety to instill anti-Jacobin views than about the lower-class appetite for them.”¹² In what is likely to remain the most searching critique, Mark Philp grants loyalist address more force than Dinwiddy and others but raises questions about the direction it would have moved ordinary readers. Philp identifies Reeves’s association with a “vulgar conservatism” that disrupted the established terms of political debate by challenging Edmund Burke’s view that “the vulgar were the object of conservative thinking, not intended participants in it.” In directing political arguments, however inflexibly and coercively, to a class of readers once felt to lie below the threshold of public opinion, association pamphleteers like William Paley and Hannah More “breached the traditional boundaries of the political nation and thereby advanced a process of mass participation which they had come into existence to prevent.” From the 1790s onward, according to this analysis, ordinary subjects were incorporated into public life by radical and reactionary writers alike, through the sheer force and range of printed works addressing them as political agents. Even where conservative activists relied on the stabilizing effects of a British national identity forged in the wars with France, they were courting an interest in political participation that had unpredictable ideological consequences.¹³ Philp’s analysis complicates a polarized historiographical debate by challenging straight-

¹¹ John Dinwiddy, “Interpretations of Anti-Jacobinism,” in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge, 1991), p. 41.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³ Mark Philp, “Vulgar Conservatism, 1792–3,” *English Historical Review* 110 (1995): 43–45, 68. For an influential account of the emergence of British national identity in this period, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992).

forward claims about the popularity of conservatism while reinforcing a sense of the association's constructive effect on popular political consciousness.

Philp's shrewd interpretive reversal has important methodological implications as well, forcing us to consider the gap between the enterprising form and reactionary content of loyalist discourse and to dwell more closely on the rhetorical features of a crucial episode in British political history. In this article, I want to revisit loyalism as a rhetorical crisis, precipitated in part by the association's effort to align antirevolutionary argument with the ordinary reader and with the power of the state. While my treatment of the loyalist enterprise is indebted to Philp's account of a movement that "mirrored radicalism's transgression of the traditional boundaries between the elite and the common people,"¹⁴ I extend this line of enquiry and qualify its implications by exploring some of the ways in which the association understood and managed its own manifestly contradictory premises. Closely scrutinized by the government, faced with public criticism from the Right as well as the Left, and goaded by a sense of radical illegitimacy, Reeves and his allies became obsessed with the legitimation of their own enterprise. They were acutely aware of the difficulties involved in mobilizing opinion against radical opinion and tried to create procedures that would facilitate public expression in order to limit the political change it effected. To be sure, this kind of self-management was imperfect, and Philp is right to stress the intractable challenge posed by any democratization of the forms of political address in the 1790s. Yet it is important to recognize that the management of unintended consequences was no casual afterthought or latent effect but rather a constitutive feature of conservative enterprise, evident in the earliest efforts to manage a popular response to the French Revolution.

My main concern here will be with the way loyalism constituted itself as a mode of public argument and political organization and not with the distinct question (too casually treated in some revisionist accounts) of whether loyalist activists effectively represented the political views of most ordinary British subjects. As A. V. Beedell has recently observed in this regard, "popular loyalism, like popular radicalism, is difficult to interpret," and evidence about the vast circulation of association pamphlets or the quantity of signatures collected for a loyalist address is typically compromised by the quasi-official framework of public organization within which such events took place.¹⁵ While a more finely

¹⁴ See Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism," p. 45.

¹⁵ A. V. Beedell, "John Reeves's Prosecution for a Seditious Libel, 1795–6: A Study in Political Cynicism," *Historical Journal* 36 (1993): 821–22. Dickinson's wide-ranging discussion in "Popular Loyalism" underscores the difficulty. He draws together impres-

grained interpretation of loyalist discourse cannot resolve the problem of representativeness, it does clarify some of the ways in which representative status was first negotiated, and in doing so it tends to complicate our understanding of what Christie termed “the British avoidance of revolution.”¹⁶ Among those who were convinced that “avoidance” required civic activism, how was public opinion mobilized in defense of a regime committed to limiting the political force of public opinion? It is not enough to insist, with Dozier, that loyalism “was not a conservative reaction” but rather “an attempt to maintain the most liberal constitution in Europe,”¹⁷ since loyalists were quite clear about the need to preserve that constitution’s limits and exclusions along with any of its more “liberal” features. The paradox of loyalist activism, deeply embedded in its discursive organization, involves the effort to combat radicalism through a set of political strategies (vernacular argument, civic assembly, public correspondence) with clear radical associations. To be sure, Reeves’s association and the London Corresponding Society were sufficiently distinct in their political aims and social foundations to prevent them from being easily confused; yet both derived their authority from the same contested terrain of popular expression and civic organization. In developing a public profile for antirevolutionary activism, through contested strategies of association, assembly, and correspondence, loyalism shifted the terms of political participation and transformed the public arenas in which it operated, even as it committed itself to identifying and combating radical transformations of the same terrain. In this sense, Reeves and his allies represent a contradictory form of reactionary enterprise, aggressive in its designs on the political sentiments of ordinary people but concerned to project a form of public spirit that was subordinate to government and the law.

Although my argument turns on loyalist efforts to manage the unintended consequences of a conservative appeal to ordinary readers, it is worth being clear at the outset about a second constitutive tension in loyalist rhetoric, involving the relationship between government and

sive evidence about the number of signatures gathered for loyalist resolutions in various towns to show that “the Association movement often reached beyond the propertied middle classes into the humbler ranks of society” (pp. 520–21) but later suggests with regard to loyalist intimidation that “perhaps most insidious of all were the efforts of several loyalist associations to pressurize every local householder into signing their addresses and resolutions” (p. 532–33). The early claim about the association’s penetration of the lower ranks is not easy to challenge, but the questions remain: how far did this “reach” extend, and in what manner was it achieved?

¹⁶ The phrase appears in the subtitle of Christie, *Stress and Stability*, the published version of his 1983–84 Ford Lectures.

¹⁷ Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, pp. 82–83.

organized conservative opinion. Commentators have long remarked on the limited and imperfect policing powers available to the eighteenth-century British state, and while the threat of English Jacobinism would seem to have invited a considerable expansion of those powers, the nature of the revolution controversy made this an unappealing option. In an important analysis of the complex relationship between loyalism and the state, David Eastwood has observed that, however energetic the official mobilization of the 1790s might have been, “the essentially defensive nature of conservative ideology explicitly precluded the possibility of major institutional reform in response to any real or imagined revolutionary threat.” Yet ambiguity about the springs of conservative authority ran both ways. Given the perceived immediacy of the threat, and the limits of their own resources, government ministers had no choice but to rely on what Eastwood terms “a new public energy” from without: “When effectively harnessed, voluntary endeavour could constitute a major augmentation of the state’s power and resources; giving government both at national and local level new capacity and new power without in any serious sense subverting the existing structure of authority within the state.”¹⁸ If this underscored official anxieties about French-style institutional innovation, it also created difficulties for those individuals and groups who were prepared to act “out of doors” in support of the government. Expressions of public opinion relied for authority on their perceived public character, which implied some degree of independence. As a matter of polemical practice, loyalists had to develop arguments on behalf of the state that did not appear to issue from the state, and they had, furthermore, to defend official interference with radical versions of their own enterprise—public assembly, pamphlet distribution, and national networks of correspondence and political organization.

As we will see, perceptions that the association emerged in close collaboration with government ministers threw its advocates on the defensive and precipitated some of loyalism’s clearest reflections on its own public character. This problem has been sustained in the historiographical record. Where Thompson dismissed as a “fiction” the idea that loyalist campaigns were “the work of ‘voluntary’ associations of ‘private’ citizens,” more sympathetic recent accounts have been concerned to show that a public campaign “encouraged” by government ministers prevailed because of “the popularity of conservative opinions among many in the middling and even the lower orders of society.”¹⁹ The dilemma of close

¹⁸ David Eastwood, “Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s,” in Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, pp. 149–50.

¹⁹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 82; Dickinson, “Popular Loyalism in Britain,” pp. 516–17.

ministerial affiliation was intensified by the association's powerful sense of its own conservative mission ("preserving") with respect to an unprecedented radical challenge. The threat of Jacobinism seemed so subversive and conspiratorial that it could not be mitigated until it was completely rooted out. The more the association appeared as a result to seek a monopoly on public expression, through a systematic campaign of legal harassment developed in concert with the government, the more it could be viewed as a dangerous innovation rather than a legitimate extension of long-standing (and essentially disorganized) traditions of civic association in support of government policy.

Managing the Spectacle of Revolutionary Envy

The role of government intervention in loyalism's understanding of itself as a public enterprise will become clearer in the second half of this article, which considers the development of the association movement in the years 1792–93, with particular emphasis on its founding and on the *Association Papers* (1793), a published compendium of the records of the London Association and the tracts it made available for national distribution. But I want to begin with a close analysis of Paley's *Reasons for Contentment; Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (1792), one of the association's earliest and best known pamphlets and to my mind its most serious and sustained reflection on the ambiguities of antirevolutionary popular address. As archdeacon of Carlisle and fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and author of *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), which became the standard text on the subject for Cambridge students well into the nineteenth century, Paley entered the political controversies of the 1790s with an impressive public reputation. *Reasons for Contentment* and a related dialogue tract brought out by the association in 1793, *Equality, As Consistent with the British Constitution*, have been described as the "zenith" of his reactionary career,²⁰ but the disposition of Paley's thought up to 1789 was by no means a reliable predictor of subsequent conservatism. His sound rejection of contractual theory proved consistent with later attacks on Thomas Paine, but the leading feature of the *Principles* was a theological utilitarianism that frustrates political categorization.²¹ Robert Hole has

²⁰ Thomas A. Horne, "'The Poor Have a Claim Founded in the Law of Nature': William Paley and the Rights of the Poor," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 55, n. 24.

²¹ For Paley's ambiguous political reputation, see Horne, "'The Poor Have a Claim Founded in the Law of Nature,'" pp. 54–55; John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 241–44. In *Stress and Stability*, Christie reclaims the *Principles* as "a systematic exposition of the intellectual tradition" on which conserva-

recently positioned Paley “at the extreme ‘liberal’ end of the Anglican spectrum,” particularly in his utilitarian commitment to “a secular view of the source of authority and obligation,” an attitude that drew sharp criticism from Evangelicals and made Paley a target of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s campaign to revive the constitutional position of the church.²² Though his social views were broadly conservative well before the 1790s, Paley famously set up the analysis of poverty in the *Principles* with a pointed comparison between the existing social order and “a flock of pigeons in a field of corn,” where ninety-nine gather everything “but the chaff and refuse” for the benefit of one, “and that the weakest perhaps and worst pigeon of the flock.”²³ The gambit earned him the nickname “Pigeon Paley” and reportedly led to the king’s refusal to appoint him bishop of Gloucester.²⁴

If there were ambiguities about Paley’s political reputation, they did not appear to trouble the association. *Reasons for Contentment* figured prominently in the *Association Papers* among a select group of works “Printed by Order of the Society,”²⁵ and the London committee and its regional affiliates brought out a number of cheap editions. The tract reappeared in later episodes of political crisis, notably in 1819 and 1831.²⁶ However, unlike many works in the association’s core catalog, *Reasons for Contentment* was not written for Reevesite distribution, having first appeared independently in 1792, in an edition that was then picked up by the movement’s Carlisle branch and recommended to Reeves and the London committee.²⁷ This provenance suggests that the

tives of the 1790s drew, but he concedes that Paley would have shared some ground with the reformers of the 1780s (pp. 159–64). See also J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 278, where Paley is treated as a “liberal and conservative” philosopher.

²² See Robert Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 79–81. For evangelical criticisms of Paley, see Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, pp. 243–44; Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 3–5. For Coleridge, see Claude Welch, “Samuel Taylor Coleridge,” in *Nineteenth-Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. Ninian Smart et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1985), 2:3–4.

²³ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 1785), pp. 92–93.

²⁴ See Horne, “‘The Poor Have a Claim Founded in the Law of Nature,’” p. 60; Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, pp. 242–43.

²⁵ *Association Papers*, pt. 1, no. 6, pp. 1–10.

²⁶ See William Paley, *Reasons for Contentment. Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (Newcastle, 1819), and *Reasons for Contentment: Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public: Together with the Fable of the Bee Hive* (London, 1831).

²⁷ See Black, *The Association*, p. 267. The earliest edition of *Reasons for Contentment* that I have seen has the imprint “Carlisle, / Printed by F. Jollie.—1792. / Price Two-pence.”

tract held a status prior to, and arguably outside of, the network of national organization and ministerial influence that perhaps compromised the more systematic activities of loyalism. To be sure, any claim about Paley's personal independence would have been disputed by reformers on the grounds of his church appointments, and his archdeaconry was prominently displayed on the title page of some versions of the tract.²⁸ Yet the prior publication of *Reason for Contentment*, along with the philosophical credentials Paley brought to loyalism, reinforce the impression left by a reading of the tract: that this is an unusually distanced and self-conscious polemic, one that bridges the association with the pre-existing political culture it sought to transform. Where Paley's later pamphlet, *Equality, As Consistent with the British Constitution*, contained elements of the dialogue form and contrived vernacular idiom that become standard in elite appeals to ordinary readers, *Reasons for Contentment* proceeded in a more reflective, probing, and even skeptical manner. Indeed, the tract sometimes reads like a proleptic meditation on the conceptual foundations of loyalism, and it is possible to reject its condescending politics while still admiring the frank way it wrestles with the conditions under which its putative audience, "the Labouring Part of the British Public," might be safely made available for political address. If in the end Paley seems to fail in bringing his "Reasons" to bear on the condition of ordinary British subjects, particularly those attracted by *The Rights of Man*, this in part because his argument reveals the hazards of a vernacular discourse that would simultaneously acknowledge and neutralize its audience as a political entity.

Reasons for Contentment begins by comparing social order with the experience of the theater, in a philosophically ambitious figure that seems calculated to address the anxieties of the author rather than the reader. It is symptomatic of his difficult rhetorical position, at the opening breach of an elite antirevolutionary address to common readers, that Paley does not immediately set about reasoning his audience into contentment but instead develops the theatrical figure in order to reflect on the conditions under which such an enterprise might take place. Though less controversial than his earlier "flock of pigeons," Paley's enlightenment version of the ancient *theatrum mundi* has a clear political lineage, having figured centrally in British moral philosophy and social theory over the course of the eighteenth century.²⁹ The opening paragraph sets the parameters for a sustained reflection on the challenges of antirevolutionary address:

²⁸ See Hole, *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order*, p. 73.

²⁹ See David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York, 1986); Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), p. 104.

Human life has been said to resemble the situation of spectators in a theatre, where, whilst each person is engaged by the scene which passes before him, no one thinks about the place in which he is seated. It is only when the business is interrupted, or when the spectator's attention to it grows idle and remiss, that he begins to consider at all, who is before him, or who is behind him, whether others are better accommodated than himself, or whether many be not much worse. It is thus with the various ranks and stations of society. So long as a man is intent upon the duties and concerns of his own condition, he never thinks of comparing it with any other; he is never troubled with reflections upon the different classes and orders of mankind, the advantages and disadvantages of each, the necessity or non-necessity of civil distinctions, much less does he feel within himself a disposition to covet or envy any of them. He is too much taken up with the occupations of his calling, its pursuits, cares, and business, to bestow unprofitable meditations upon the circumstances in which he sees others placed. And by this means a man of a sound and active mind has, in his very constitution, a remedy against the disturbance of envy and discontent. These passions gain no admittance into his breast, because there is no leisure there or vacancy for the trains of thought which generate them. He enjoys therefore ease in this respect, and ease resulting from the best cause, the power of keeping his imagination at home; of confining it to what belongs to himself, instead of sending it forth to wander amongst speculations which have neither limits nor use, amidst views of unattainable grandeur, fancied happiness, of extolled, because unexperienced, privileges and delights.³⁰

From the outset, Paley narrows the range of theatrical possibilities. What absorbs his attention is not the dramatic activity on stage nor its effect on the audience nor even the architecture of the theater itself but rather "the situation of spectators" with respect to each other. The fragile attention of these spectators, as they are distracted by relative privilege, comes to stand for the fragility of a hierarchical social order.

Interestingly, such a response accords less with the traditions of political discourse than with Henry Fielding's development of the *theatrum mundi* as a set piece in the first chapter of book 7 of *Tom Jones* (1749), "A comparison between the world and the stage." As Ronald Paulson has suggested, Fielding's contribution to the theatrical metaphor was to divert attention "from the stage . . . to the audience, its divisions, different responses, and tendency to confuse actor and role. The audience be-

³⁰ William Paley, *Reasons for Contentment; Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (London, 1793), pp. 3–4; all further references to *Reasons for Contentment* are to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.

comes the most important part of the metaphor.”³¹ Yet for Fielding this shift did not exclude other theatrical possibilities. Though he wanted to restore the audience’s “claps and shouts” to a tradition that had long developed theatrical resemblances “from the stage only,” Fielding still insisted on the orientation of his spectators toward some dramatic action, and his mock-heroic references to “the scenes of this great theatre of Nature” preserved comic traces of the figure’s ancient comprehensiveness.³² There is, by contrast, very little sense of the stage in Paley’s *theatrum mundi*, and this limited scope yields a double fragmentation, separating individual spectators from each other and from the spectacle they have come to observe. Like the “remiss” readers he would correct, this 1790s pamphleteer seems too concerned with the “civil distinctions” represented by a theater audience to notice what takes place on stage or to account for its meaning within his unfolding figure.

Reactionary treatments of the French Revolution as a dangerous theatrical distraction suggest that the eclipse of the stage from *Reasons for Contentment* may be an act of repression. William Wordsworth traced depraved popular taste and the degenerate condition of “the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country” to a “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” caused in part by “great national events” like the French Revolution. And Burke similarly condemned the “taste” and “moral sentiments” of those who responded sympathetically to the Revolution: “There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouse the imagination.”³³ Yet Paley’s theatrical figure is overdetermined, and our sense of a revolution (or a revolutionary attention to spectacle) repressed in this opening paragraph should not prevent us from recognizing what Paley has achieved with his exclusive orientation toward an audience. In diminishing the scope of the *theatrum mundi* (Fielding’s “great theatre”) and in severing his audience from the stage, Paley generates a more manageable form of public subjectivity: insulated from the “unprofitable meditations” that interrupt ordinary “business,” his “man of sound and active mind” will not succumb to revolutionary “envy and discontent.”³⁴ John Rieder has observed that “the crucial problem” in *Reasons*

³¹ Ronald Paulson, “Life as Journey and as Theater: Two Eighteenth-Century Narrative Structures,” *New Literary History* 8 (1976): 52.

³² Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. John Bender and Simon Stern (Oxford, 1996), pp. 284–85.

³³ William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Selected Prose*, ed. John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth, 1988), p. 284; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis, 1987), pp. 56–57.

³⁴ In this sense, Paley’s attitudes may derive from some of the social and cultural developments that tended to private closet rather than public stage and left the world as

for *Contentment* is “the way the poor become aware of their place in society.”³⁵ If so, Paley’s first solution to the problem is simply to eliminate the social dimension of that popular awareness.

In this sense, the opening meditation on the fraught spectacle of public life does not so much account for Paley’s own public intervention as it does imagine a world in which such intervention would be unnecessary: subjects who lack a capacity for social comparison do not need to be reasoned out of any discontent with their place in the world. The figure of theater has therefore become an aid against reflection, even as it curiously mimics the trajectory of a reflecting mind in its return from extravagant outward “speculations” to the narrow parameters of the individual’s “own condition” and “imagination.” Paley’s magisterial shift from the initial figure to its political import (“It is thus with the various ranks and stations of society”) requires an equally deliberate shift away from expansive social theater to the narrower “duties and concerns” of each individual. As a result, any conclusion tends to defeat the collective point of the initial resemblance. Put another way, the three terms established by “the situation of spectators in a theatre” (“spectator,” “scene,” and “situation”) are substantially reworked in the “remedy against the disturbance of envy and discontent” that follows: scene and situation collapse on the figure of the spectator, who becomes absorbed in a “confining” loop of individual attention to individual “pursuits, cares, and business.” If the hierarchical idiom (“ranks and stations,” “classes and orders”) suggests a frank acknowledgment of the actual social heterogeneity of the late eighteenth-century London theater,³⁶ it is important to recognize that differences are noticed only so they can be overlooked or repressed, through the subject’s salutary “power of keeping his imagination at home.” This treatment of the mind as “home” reinforces the shift from public to private concerns, just as an interest in the “very constitution” of the individual seems calculated to defuse an explosive public debate in the 1790s over the constitution of the British state.

Given Paley’s hasty retreat from risky social theater to a secure

stage “a forgotten metaphor.” See J. Paul Hunter, “The World as Stage and Closet,” in *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660–1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington, D.C., 1984), pp. 271–87.

³⁵ John Rieder, “Civic Virtue and Social Class at the Scene of Execution: Wordsworth’s Salisbury Plain Poems,” *Studies in Romanticism* 30 (1991): 334.

³⁶ Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800–1885* (Stanford, Calif., 1995), pp. 34–38; Marc Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 46–52; John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997), pp. 351–56.

private condition, it is worth emphasizing that social envy had not always seemed an unqualified hazard. On the contrary, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) developed a more mixed response to the spectacle of elite privilege, insisting on its inevitability and on the ambiguity of its social effects: "This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments."³⁷ By 1792, Paley substitutes a "disposition to covet or envy" for Smith's "disposition to admire" and does not credit this disposition with securing hierarchy. The case against revolution becomes a case for a popular "imagination" that is so thoroughly privatized and domesticated and so devoid of social considerations that the individual can be a spectacle only to himself, "intent upon the duties and concerns of his own condition." In refusing the figure of theater, the opening paragraph of *Reasons for Contentment* refuses the very principle of an internalized moral sense, understood by Smith and other eighteenth-century moralists to emerge reflexively, through a complex process of observing others and imagining oneself being observed in return by them.³⁸ As a framework for developing the public profile of anti-revolutionary activism, then, Paley's dramatic figure seeks to short-circuit rather than rework the concerted theatricality of the British moral tradition. And while it may be tempting to coordinate the opening paragraph of *Reasons for Contentment* with the theatrical displays of state power that have recently absorbed the attention of historians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, the occlusion of stage effect in favor of individual self-regard suggests that Paley is not anticipating subsequent efforts to deploy public spectacle and pageantry for patriotic ends.³⁹ The social space of theater is introduced here so that it can be refused as an appropriate conservative figure for political life and public attention in 1792—refused precisely because it risks disclosing those

³⁷ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, 1984), p. 61. For the spectatorial framework of this consideration in Smith, see Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*, pp. 187–88; and Stewart Justman, "Regarding Others," *New Literary History* 27 (1996): 84–85.

³⁸ Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*, pp. 173–74.

³⁹ For discussions of state spectacle and theater in this period, which have involved a good deal of disagreement about the precise nature and effect of public displays designed to secure popular loyalty, see Colley, *Britons*, pp. 195–236; Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 1995); and Timothy Jenks, "Contesting the Hero: The Funeral of Admiral Lord Nelson," *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000): 422–53.

matters of social difference and economic inequality that were the object of radical protest.

Yet *Reasons for Contentment* remains compelling in part because it fails to sustain this initial containment of political subjectivity. Paley's effort to arrest the figure of theater is itself arrested, as his second paragraph begins the uneasy transition from a reflective prose (aimed against reflection) to a more routine didacticism that would manage and direct, rather than foreclose, the wayward attention of the working poor:

The wisest advice that can be given is, never to allow our attention to dwell upon comparisons between our own condition and that of others, but to keep it fixed upon the duties and concerns of the condition itself. But since every man has not this power; since the minds of some men will be busy in contemplating the advantages which they see others possess, and since persons in laborious stations of life are wont to view the higher ranks of society with sentiments which not only tend to make themselves unhappy, but which are very different from the truth, it may be an useful office to point out to them some of these considerations, which, if they *will* turn their thoughts to the subject, they should endeavour to take fairly into account. (Pp. 4–5)

As abruptly as he first closed down the theater of social difference, Paley here reopens it with himself in the role of director or theater manager, a "useful office" that allows him to "point out" considerations that mitigate inequality. The dramatic gesture accords with the governing figure and with the impression of a theater that is oddly absorbed in the orientation of its audience. It also suggests something distinctive about Paley's rhetorical construction of "the Labouring Part of the British Public." Loyalist pamphleteering normally registered the presence of this readership through the use of vernacular idioms, proverbial wisdom, or a humble frame of reference, and this is Paley's practice too later in the tract. But the nominal working-class audience first arrives here as a distinctive point of view within the theater of social relations, and specifically, as a dangerous affective response to the hierarchical ordering of those relations: "persons in laborious stations of life are wont to view the higher ranks of society with sentiments which . . . make themselves unhappy." This pivotal Smithian insight leads directly to Paley's own authorial "office" and to the real work of reasoning the plebeian reader into contentment. By 1792, "busy" minds are busy "contemplating the advantages which they see others possess," and for this reason the fall into a (potentially) revolutionary self-consciousness about inferior social position cannot simply be reversed or wished away. The new conditions

for public life that result are nowhere more vividly instantiated than in Paley's own political address to a "Part of the British Public" once felt to lie outside of the political nation.

From here, *Reasons for Contentment* proceeds through a sequence of "considerations" meant to demonstrate the relative "advantages of those laborious conditions of life, which compose the great portion of every human community" (p. 8). A didactic turn makes itself felt in the tract's increasingly rudimentary and disaggregative style of announcement: "Another article, which the poor are apt to envy in the rich, is their *ease*. Now here they mistake the matter totally. They call inaction ease, whereas nothing is farther from it. Rest is ease. That is true. But no man can rest who has not worked. Rest is the cessation of labour" (p. 16). The stylistic contrast with the tract's opening meditation could not be more sharply drawn, yet Paley's tendency to isolate his subjects and fragment his claims in order to distribute elementary rewards is undermined by the fact that estimates about envy require more coordinated and socially relative considerations. In the sentence following this passage, the desire to assign "ease" exclusively to "labour" is undone, along with a simple declarative prose, by the recognition that a somatic state of "rest" only becomes a psychosocially desirable condition of "ease" through the alchemy of a differential gaze: "The rich see, and not without envy, the refreshment and pleasure which rest affords to the poor, and chuse to wonder that they cannot find the same enjoyment in being free from the necessity of working at all" (p. 16).

In orchestrating this kind of envious regard, *Reasons for Contentment* becomes an increasingly complex and convoluted exercise in the manipulation of collective forms of attention. The project is essentially theatrical, and Paley secures his point with a tableau that encourages ordinary readers to achieve contentment by appreciating the "envy" to which privileged observers are driven by the spectacle of their own modest lives: "I have heard it said that if the face of happiness can any where be seen, it is in the summer evening of a country village. Where, after the labours of the day, each man, at his door, with his children, amongst his neighbors, feels his frame and his heart at rest, every thing about him pleased and pleasing, and a delight and complacency in his sensations far beyond what either luxury or diversion can afford. The rich want this; and they want what they must never have" (pp. 16–17). To flatter the poor with the impression they make on their jealous superiors is by itself a simple enough gesture, the stock in trade of anti-Jacobin argument. Paley's rural vignette was translated into dialogue form in subsequent association tracts like *The Labourer and the Gentleman*, when the complaint of a restless Labourer—"I envy the 'Squire every time I

hear his dinner bell”—was answered by a Gentleman’s soothing mediation of social extremes: “It was only yesterday he told me he envied you.”⁴⁰ Yet the crude reversal of class advantage proves more compelling in relation to Paley’s theatrical assessment of the epistemological conditions under which relative deprivation becomes intelligible to ordinary subjects. The “face of happiness” in a “country village” may be a widely available spectacle (“can anywhere be seen”), but the enjoined popular response is not possible within the framework of unreflective self-absorption recommended in first paragraph. A contained imagination cannot know what others want. In its underlying logic, the reactionary contentment that Paley reaches later in the tract is a postlapsarian condition, the result of a fall into public consciousness, and it therefore requires the more knowing “kaleidoscope of reflections and representations” at work in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁴¹

The same can be said of Paley’s own rhetorical enterprise. To restore popular subordination through public argument is to encourage a densely mediated and essentially social (rather than private or “confining”) act of reflection, in which readers come to understand their own relative privilege through an informed appreciation of the jealous regard of others. This effort to reverse rather than interrupt the course of public resentment indicates just how far Paley has traveled from his early strictures against envy and from his initial suspicion of theatricalized social relations. As *Reasons for Contentment* unfolds, revolutionary envy of another is reworked as antirevolutionary appreciation of another’s envy: “The rich want this; and they want what they must never have.” Within the framework of the revolution controversy, this recuperation of social jealousy is a striking gesture. Paley has added envy to the list of intractable facts about human nature and the human condition that conservatives were fond of marshalling against their speculative Jacobin enemies.

In some respects, this kind of theorizing reinforces the tract’s initial preference for the mind at “home,” since Paley leaves no doubt about where the laboring man should look for the contentment denied his superiors. “One . . . constant spring of satisfaction, and almost infallible support of cheerfulness and spirits, is the exercise of domestic affections” (p. 18). As in the tract’s opening sequence, however, any suppression of risky social theater proves imperfect. *Reasons for Contentment* deftly accommodates its own public purposes, as rhetorical performance and political argument, by making domestic stability available through the author’s “useful office” of instruction. This requires an at-

⁴⁰ Association Papers, pt. 2, no. 3, p. 10.

⁴¹ Marshall, *The Figure of Theater*, p. 173.

tentive subject, one whose “power of keeping his imagination at home” has so fully eroded that he now regards “every thing about him,” including the regard of others. For this reason, it is worth considering the exact position Paley assigns his contented village laborer with respect to the wider community. In his immediate social relations (“with his children, amongst his neighbours”), this figure accords with Burke’s principle of the “little platoon,” that “first link” in the anti-Jacobin “series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind.”⁴² The liminality of the laborer’s attitude is no less striking (“in the summer evening,” “after the labours of the day,” “at his door”), and it suggests another way of aggregating individuals, one more closely governed by the tract’s Smithian moral logic. A complacent inferior can only witness the jealousy of his superiors if he occupies a position that is at once domestic yet out of doors, self-possessed yet available to others. Where the initial orientation of the figure of theater toward audience relations created a gap in distracting stage effect, that gap is filled here by a closely mediated and reduplicated spectacle: the author directs the reader to observe an observer and to find himself in the eyes of another.

In this way, counterrevolutionary argument is fully implicated in the relentless logic of publicity that shadows *Reasons for Contentment*. Tempting as it might have been to propose a wholly domestic solution to the public crisis of the 1790s, Paley cannot help but place the laboring subject “at his door,” rather than safely indoors, if he expects that subject to be available for public argument. The open cottage door remained a pervasive feature of anti-Jacobin pamphleteering, particularly in More’s *Cheap Repository*, where it made the lives of the rural poor available to charitable middle-class interference. Recall for the purposes of comparison the related triangle in *The Labourer and the Gentleman*, when the Gentleman called the Labourer’s attention to the envious gaze of the ‘Squire: “It was only yesterday he told me he envied you.”’ In preparing the way for just this kind of schematic loyalist dialogue and for his own subsequent pamphlet, *Equality, As Consistent with the British Constitution*, Paley had to establish and occupy the pivotal position of the Gentleman, a third party responsible for managing and defusing volatile encounters between rich and poor. Again, the postlapsarian approach to contentment as a politically constructed and polemically enforced condition contains an implicit challenge to more nostalgic or retrospective varieties of conservatism. If the “face of happiness” can be observed “in the summer evening of a country village,” this is not because summer evenings or English country villages have any inherent power to guaran-

⁴² Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 41.

tee civic order but rather because “William Paley, M. A. Archdeacon of Carlisle” has, as the title page indicates, undertaken to provide “the Labouring Part of the British Public” with “Reasons” for their contentment, in a penny tract that was subsidized and distributed, often for free, by the London Association and its national affiliates.⁴³

This acknowledgment that communities are secured from revolution by interjected political argument, not by their own internal configuration, completes Paley’s departure from the confined terms of his opening theatrical figure. As *Reasons for Contentment* winds to a close, one late maxim sums up the more complex pedagogical assumptions that underlie an interventionist vulgar conservatism: “To learn the art of contentment is only to learn what happiness actually consists in” (p. 18).⁴⁴ Far from being a matter of inherent self-possession (“in his very constitution”), the laboring man’s counterrevolutionary “power of keeping his imagination at home” is an acquired and transmitted “art,” one that requires the speculative comparison across class lines that so troubled the first paragraph. Even the author’s own detached sense of rhetorical mastery takes shape within a complex order of social relations. While the rehearsed formulas that govern key turns in the argument (“Human life has been said to resemble . . . ,” “I have heard it said that if the face of happiness can any where be seen . . .”) are broadly characteristic of a didactic mode, they serve here to identify knowledge as a mediated and communicated substance. And far from evincing embedded forms of vernacular knowledge, these proverbs are subject regularly to authorial elaborations that depart from the terms of the original formula: the theater of human life is no longer a place where individuals can safely ignore the situation of their fellow spectators; summer evenings in a country village betray the frustrations of the rich rather than the happiness of the poor. To become effective, Paley’s counterrevolutionary “reasons” have to be witnessed by others and assisted by dramatic gestures (“to point out”) that implicate the author in his own theatrical figure. Contentment is restored to the 1790s when the potentially Jacobinized working man is joined on the political landscape by an equally novel figure, the didactic author of conservative political tracts for the poor. *Reasons for Contentment* closes with a final warning that social change invariably under-

⁴³ See Mitchell, “The Association Movement,” pp. 72–73, for an example of the printing and free distribution of *Reasons for Contentment* by the Manchester Association.

⁴⁴ In this sense, the kind of political contentment promulgated by Paley and by the association movement more broadly, confirms Colley’s point in *Britons* about national feeling in the period: “Active commitment to Great Britain was not, could not be a given. It had to be learnt; and men and women needed to see some advantage in learning it” (p. 295).

mines human happiness, a tenet that is rescued from reflex conservatism by the striking manner in which it gets introduced: "If to these reasons for contentment the reflecting husbandman or artificer adds another very material one, that changes of condition, which are attended with a breaking up and sacrifice of our ancient course and habit of living, never can be productive of happiness" (p. 22). The vivid conjuring of an acute common reader again reverses Paley's early injunction against popular "reflections" and "speculations" and orchestrates a dramatic clash between a Burkean commitment to "our ancient course and habit of living" and the more disruptive reactionary claim of the tract's title: popular contentment now depends on the general public exercise of political reason, rather than on inherited constitutional benefits or the salutary ignorance of the poor. The "reflecting husbandman or artificer" has turned out to be the unexpected remainder of loyalist discourse.

"Associate to Counteract": Organizing Conservative Opinion

What distinguishes *Reasons for Contentment* from the great mass of "popular" antirevolutionary writing that appeared in the 1790s is the sophistication it betrays about its own status as political argument and public performance. Though initially reluctant to imagine and enter on a political address to ordinary readers, Paley soon accepts the fall into a theater of social difference and then attempts to work through its implications for conservative argument. The result is an antirevolutionary didacticism that attends not only to what the poor should be made to believe but also to the conditions and forms of attention that make such beliefs possible. The point is not that Paley transcends his fellow pamphleteers nor that he misses their mark; instead, he anticipates and frames similar polemical efforts, and in fact his own later tract, *Equality, As Consistent with the British Constitution*, more closely follows loyalist norms. In tracing a sequence of attitudes toward reactionary popular address, *Reasons for Contentment* delivers in unexpected ways on the promise of its title and offers a public reasoning through of the conditions for political discourse in 1792. As the psychically confined subject of the first paragraph gives way to "the reflecting husbandman or artificer," Paley confirms Philp's account of an inclusive vulgar conservatism and dramatizes the considerations that led its author away from a simple defense of the established order and into a more complex and potentially compromised political address to the common reader. The burden of the figure of theater as it unfolds in *Reasons for Contentment* is first to under-

score the appeal (among conservatives) of a society that holds its ordinary subjects just below the threshold of political consciousness and then to demonstrate the futility of imagining such a society after 1789. Once reciprocal spectatorship in a heterogeneous social order is allowed, envy and resentment need to be organized rather than suppressed.

What is missing from *Reasons for Contentment* and what was not yet available at the time of its composition and first circulation was an account of the mechanisms of civic organization and subsidized distribution through which “these reasons” could be made available to “the Labouring Part of the British Public” and other reasons (Paine’s, for example) effectively discountenanced and proscribed. If Paley’s tract aired the logic of a conservative address to the working poor, the association forged the necessary institutional framework. At the same time, the frankness with which Paley reasoned through his own rhetorical difficulties, even as he reasoned his audience into contentment, suggests that vulgar conservative argument was capable of acknowledging and managing its own tensions and inconsistencies. For what is finally striking about *Reasons for Contentment* is not just that it concedes the political consciousness of “the Labouring Part of the British Public” but that it does so after conceding its preference for a prepolitical and prepublic subjectivity—the social imagination of the laboring man confined “to what belongs to himself.” Paley’s determined orchestration of the reciprocal gaze between rich and poor was soon vigorously reinforced by the association movement, whose repressive designs belie the abstract spectacle and idealized domesticity that alternately frame *Reasons for Contentment*. When it was picked up and reprinted by the London committee and regional loyalist affiliates, the tract entered a catalog of similar publications and a range of public enterprises, which extended from political meetings and national correspondence to a vigorous campaign of criminal prosecution against the radical press. If vulgar conservative address did invite ordinary readers to join a discussion of national affairs, the invitation was heavily qualified and came with rules, as it were, for the conduct of deliberation within a hierarchically organized political public sphere.

Chief among these rules was the government supervision of public assembly and print expression, a layer of official control that can be understood as a coercive frame on Paley’s didactic “office” of managing the restless attention of the poor. Historians have disagreed about the extent of this supervision, and the debate often hinges on whether the establishment of the association in late 1792 was an independent or state-sponsored event. Though they shared ministerial connections and government incomes, Reeves and his fellow projectors insisted that they were

acting as “private men” and that “none of the King’s Ministers knew or heard of this Association, till they saw the first advertisement in the public prints” in November 1792.⁴⁵ One leading historian of eighteenth-century associational practices rejects this disclaimer and argues instead that “the decision to act was coordinated in advance with the ministry.”⁴⁶ Others have maintained that the evidence is less clear, since government support for the association fell into place after Reeves’s first meetings and since some regional loyalist clubs remained independent of the London committee.⁴⁷ The stakes of the debate for recent efforts to rehabilitate conservative opinion are clear, since careful government engineering of the association would cast a shadow over any popular support it achieved. In the most important recent contribution to the debate, Michael Duffy has drawn on newly uncovered correspondence to clarify ministerial involvement and to provide the clearest account yet of how the association operated within a wider sphere of antirevolutionary opinion and enterprise. As might be expected, Duffy’s careful reconstruction of events indicates neither absolute government control nor spontaneous public initiative but rather a more complex and compromised series of transactions between the two. He shows that by late 1792 the government was under considerable pressure to act against the increasing confidence of radical societies, with the foreign secretary Lord Grenville going so far as to complain that “we are called upon on all sides for counter associations.” While ministers did signal their interest in civic initiatives that would strengthen their hand, Duffy concludes that Reeves’s enterprise “was not preconcerted with the ministers” but was instead selected for official support after the first advertisements appeared in the London press. William Pitt himself bluntly assessed the value of ministerial engagement with public initiative, remarking that enthusiasm for Reeves’s advertisements “shews that there is a Spirit and Disposition to Activity which if We give it at the outset a right Direction may be improved to very important purposes.” Improvement and “right Direction” were necessary in part because members of the government were sensitive to

⁴⁵ Association Papers, preface, p. iv. For the various government connections and positions of the committee members, see Mitchell, “The Association Movement,” p. 59, and n. 17.

⁴⁶ Black, *The Association*, p. 237. Beedell, “John Reeves’s Prosecution,” p. 801; and Donald E. Ginter, “The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792–93 and British Public Opinion,” *Historical Journal* 9 (1996): 179, also suggest a government role in the founding. See Eastwood, “Patriotism and the English State,” pp. 154–55, for a review of the debate as well as an interesting suggestion that there may have been local government inspiration for the movement.

⁴⁷ See Dickinson, “Popular Loyalism in Britain,” pp. 516–18, and “Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism,” pp. 120–22; and Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, pp. 55–60, 76–77.

the terms of Philp's paradox, especially the way that "counter associations" involving public correspondence through regional affiliates risked mirroring the structure of radical associations. "It is a very delicate point," the home secretary Henry Dundas wrote, "for Government in the present moment to invite Associations of one kind, when they will be called upon soon to condemn so many others."⁴⁸

Ministerial "Direction" over the emerging loyalist movement turned out to be a less abstract exercise than Paley's "pointing out." Beyond government patronage in the form of newspaper advertisements and free postage, there were disciplinary revisions to the association's charter that suggest a concerted policy of state intervention in the political public sphere. Ministers concerned, as one put it, "to uphold rather than weaken the Authority of regular Government" were not happy with Reeves's original plan for a broad-based movement involving large meetings several times a week. Instead, they formulated a program by which tractable committees would supervene smaller and less frequent public gatherings. "In this Way We hope to avoid the Inconvenience of much public Discussion at Numerous Meetings," Pitt explained, "and yet have the Impression and Effect of Numbers on our Side."⁴⁹ Duffy usefully distinguishes between two published plans for the association: the first drawn up by Reeves and his collaborators at a 20 November meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, the second issuing from a subsequent meeting on 24 November.⁵⁰ Ministerial revisions to Reeves's original plan were incorporated into the second version of an association charter: "It should seem, that the business of such Societies should be conducted by a Committee, and that the Committees should be small, as better adapted for dispatch of business; for it should be remembered, that these are not open Societies for talk and debate, but for private consultation and real business. The society at large need not meet more than once a month, or once in two or three months, to audit the accounts, and see to the application of the money."⁵¹ In its first public pronouncement, before Pitt's intervention, the association had struck a keynote of free and

⁴⁸ Michael Duffy, "William Pitt and the Origins of the Loyalist Association Movement of 1792," *Historical Journal* 39 (1996): 947–48, 952–53. My account in this and the following paragraph is indebted to Duffy's analysis. The tendency of the loyalist association movement to reflect the dynamics of radicalism has often been noticed. See, e.g., Mitchell, "The Association Movement," p. 58; Dickinson, "Popular Loyalism in Britain," p. 526; Black, *The Association*, pp. 267–70. For government suspicion of clubs and associations, see Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, pp. 102–5.

⁴⁹ Duffy, "William Pitt and the Origins of the Loyalist Association Movement," pp. 956–57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 950–52, 954–55.

⁵¹ Association Papers, pt. 1, *Proceedings of the Association*, no. 1, pp. 7–8.

open assembly: “We do, as private men, unconnected with any Party, . . . think it expedient to form ourselves into an ASSOCIATION.”⁵² This spirited sense of private men associating for public purposes came to ring hollow as the movement closed the ranks of an exclusive “Committee” and devolved the work of association from open “talk and debate” to a form of “consultation” that remained “private” (in the sense of closed) even after its appearance on the public stage. As it turned out, committee structure reinforced hierarchy. Even historians who insist on the movement’s broad appeal have concluded that, while the common people may well have attended meetings and participated in demonstrations and addresses, committee membership was restricted to men of property, especially “the gentry and substantial farmers in rural areas, and the leading merchants, manufacturers and professional men in the towns.”⁵³

The structural resistance of loyalist association to unregulated deliberation (“these are not open Societies for talk and debate”) was reinforced by the negative mission statement that immediately followed the key resolution about limited public meetings: “The object of such Societies should be to check the circulation of seditious publications of all kinds, whether newspapers or pamphlets, or the invitations to club meetings, by discovering and bringing to justice not only the authors and printers of them, but those who keep them in shops, or hawk them in the streets for sale.”⁵⁴ In the published reports of the 24 November meeting, this repressive “object” preceded even the narrowly defined positive purpose of “circulating cheap books and papers” to “undeceive those poor people who have been misled by the infusion of opinions dangerous to their own welfare and that of the State.”⁵⁵ Although it would be a mistake to ignore the steady stream of elementary political tracts that soon flowed from association presses, the reduplication of negative terms (“undeceive,” “misled”) betrays a reluctance to approach political opinion in constructive terms. Making popular loyalist opinion was essentially a matter of unmaking popular radicalism—of undeceiving the deceived.

Just as *Reasons for Contentment* invoked “the Labouring Part of the British Public” in order to blunt its political impact, so the associa-

⁵² Ibid., p. 5.

⁵³ Mitchell, “The Association Movement,” pp. 64–67; Dickinson, “Popular Loyalism in Britain,” pp. 519–20; Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, pp. 77–79. For a satirical treatment of the formula for a typical association gathering, see Black, *The Association*, pp. 256–57.

⁵⁴ Association Papers, pt. 1, *Proceedings of the Association*, no. 1, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 7–8.

tion followed inconsistent lines of development. At times, loyalism displayed a surprising willingness to organize itself under the sign of opposition, as *counterassociation*, even where it was most closely aligned with the purposes of the state. In this sense, the crisis of the early 1790s was a signal episode in the antithetical history of political expression in Britain. While Terry Eagleton and others have rightly discovered the radical origins of a counterpublic sphere in the era's "whole oppositional network of journals, clubs, pamphlets, debates and institutions,"⁵⁶ it is important to understand that radical reform had no monopoly on the heady politics of resistance. Reactionary movements spawned by the same crisis were not simply a rearguard defense of some hegemonic arena of exchange but instead represent a calculated and historically ambiguous response to radical counterpublicity. Again, to assign conservatism exclusively to residual social forms is to accept its own mythology. At the same time, the government's decisive role serves to remind us that the association was no spontaneous act of public resistance to the threat of revolution. Even Reeves, a "more radically reactionary" figure than Burke,⁵⁷ first conceived a more dynamic public enterprise than the government was prepared to allow. In this sense, the whole Reevesite moment can be understood as a critical episode in a state campaign to reorganize public opinion in light of its threatening contemporary development. Through the association, the rapidly changing institutions of the political public sphere would be favorably disposed toward the unreformed constitutional state, at the precise moment when that state faced a critical challenge to its own legitimacy. Of course, we should not exaggerate the novelty or the efficacy of this development. Loyalist association rested on longstanding traditions of voluntary initiative in support of the government and fell well short of exercising absolute control over print expression and public opinion. It is not easy to describe the exact combination of state policy and public initiative that the association involved, and historians have long wrestled with imperfectly qualified terms: "semiofficial organs of government," "a respectable and officially-sanctioned campaign," "a kind of ideological outrigger to a conservative state."⁵⁸ What is clear is that, in its systematic organization

⁵⁶ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-structuralism* (London, 1984), p. 36. For an account of the notion of a counterpublic sphere in relation to the resurgent radicalism of the 1810s and 1820s, see Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–10.

⁵⁷ Beedell, "Reeves's Prosecution," p. 804.

⁵⁸ Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*, p. 78; J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 263; Eastwood, "Patriotism and the English State," p. 157.

and national scope, the association effectively transformed available practices of civic enterprise in support of government policy.

The steady stream of reports that were subsequently gathered in the *Association Papers* did not hesitate to account for loyalism as a public enterprise directed against radical opinion within limits sanctioned by the state. In a significant echo of the Burke of the 1770s, the report of the 24 November meeting invoked the “seditious” presence of radical “Clubs and associations” to justify the association’s call on like-minded persons to “form similar Societies in different parts of the town”: “Good men associate to counteract those evil designs.” At the same time, the London committee set clear limits on the antirevolutionary activism it was prepared to sanction and warned that “it should be a part of the original compact of every such Society, that in what they mean to do, they shall always act in subordination to the Magistrate and the Executive Government.” Given the prevailing controversy over the French Revolution and Paine’s *Rights of Man*, the contractual language is striking and again suggests a concerted antithetical design. The radical implications of an “original compact” are neutralized as soon as they are invoked: in calling itself into being as a public, a loyal public announced its incapacity to challenge the power of the state. Throughout the association’s formative rhetoric, subordination to government and the law serve to distinguish reactionary public enterprise from its radical opposite: “To associate in the forms in which *they* do (as appears by their printed papers exhibited to this Society) is always seditious, and very often treasonable: they all appear to be offenders against the law. To meet, as is now proposed, for suppressing sedition, for propagating peaceable opinions, and for aiding the magistracy in subordination to the direction of the Magistrates—the law allows it, and the time requires it.”⁵⁹ Even this straightened understanding of the range and authority of public opinion was cautiously handled by the association, as a regrettable aberration demanded by “the time” and by the critical threat of revolution. The anxieties of loyalist organization derive in part from the movement’s compromised understanding of its own activity.

Even where the early rhetoric of loyalism approached some wider theoretical self-justification, this arrived by way of apology rather than political manifesto:

The Society, after full consideration of the nature of private meetings, formed with a design to take cognisance of what is transacted by the Execu-

⁵⁹ Association Papers, pt. 1, *Proceedings of the Association*, no. 1, p. 8.

tive and the Legislative Powers of the country, are of the opinion, that all such meetings are irregular. Such distinct and unharmonized centers have the effect of intercepting and drawing around themselves some of that force, and confidence of the people, which should pass on to their only true center, the constituted Executive and Legislative Authorities of the State. But where such an irregularity has been once permitted, and the balance of the system seems to be affected by it, the equilibrium perhaps cannot be more naturally restored, than by placing a counterpoise of the same sort on the other side.⁶⁰

Here, the paired principles of radical “irregularity” and conservative “counterpoise” provide a check on the scope of antirevolutionary publicity, and they serve notice too that the antithetical and crisis-bound logic of counterassociation does not follow ordinary models of party antagonism. On the contrary, loyal opinion operates within a field of forces that is at once polar (“counterpoise”) and centripetal (“center”). Faced with the disruptive or “intercepting” influence of radical protest, the association offered itself as the appropriate conduit through which the whole “force” of popular opinion could return to its “only true center, the constituted Executive and Legislative Authority of the State.” Yet the ambiguities of loyalism were firmly embedded in the rhetoric of its early development. For in working to subordinate public deliberation to state power, Reeves and his allies exercised judgments normally assigned to government and the law. The association’s formal “opinion” about sedition resulted from a “full consideration of the nature of private meetings” and an examination of “printed papers exhibited to this Society.” When the members of the London committee disbanded in June 1793, on the grounds that the crisis of the previous winter had passed, the announcement combined an almost obsessive desire to record and publish their own activities with the reaffirmation of a straightened understanding of public opinion. “They associated on a special occasion, and for a defined purpose; and when that occasion was passed, and that purpose was served, they suspended their proceedings.”⁶¹ By 1794, most regional branches followed suit, though their political energy soon resurfaced as the volunteer movement mobilized against a French invasion.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 7–8.

⁶¹ Ibid., preface, p. iii.

⁶² See Mitchell, “The Association Movement,” pp. 74–77. For the development of the volunteer movement, which shares a number of key features with loyalist association, see Cookson, “The English Volunteer Movement,” pp. 867–91; J. R. Western, “The Volunteer Movement as an Anti-revolutionary Force, 1793–1801” *English Historical Review* 71 (1956): 603–14.

The Archive of Antirevolutionary Association

The tendency to understand print expression and public assembly as inferior extensions of ministerial power was critically reinforced when the association filled out its catalog with documentary evidence of state controls on political opinion. Recent reconstructions of conservative opinion have tended to overlook the way that loyalism manifested itself, even beyond the courtroom, as an implacable expression of the power to silence. At the same London meeting where Pitt achieved restrictions on loyalist assembly and just before the sanctioned appearance of Paley's *Reasons for Contentment*, the association announced that its first printed work would be the "CHARGE delivered by Mr. JUSTICE ASHURST [*sic*] to the Grand Jury in the Court of King's Bench this term,"⁶³ a charge that originated in the legal assault on radical organization. The status of this courtroom transcript as a political pamphlet bears some consideration. Made available by the association through a number of London and provincial publishers, in formats ranging from cheap pamphlets to handbills and broadsides, the charge acquired a calculated afterlife in the same arena of printed opinion that its first oral delivery was intended to police. Ashhurst anticipated later reiterations of his speech and endorsed the association's collaborative logic by calling to "public service" those jurors in "a private station" as well as those "invested with the office of Magistracy" and by launching a broad defense of the right of government to extend its "coercive" and "restraining hand" against publications "in which the Author disclaims all ideas of Subordination." In passing these instructions along to the nation, with the insistence that they "must be read with Heart-felt Satisfaction by every true ENGLISHMAN," *Mr. Justice Ashhurst's Charge* in effect reconstituted the reading public as a jury, in ways that echo Ashhurst's initial treatment of the jury as public. Gathered by the association with ministerial support, readers of the pamphlet were enjoined to witness and countenance the law and to follow the government's lead in condemning "seditious and unconstitutional doctrines."⁶⁴ Ashhurst's speech was soon joined in print by other judicial charges, and the association then extended this strategy to other official forms of expression, including the royal proclamation of May 1792 against seditious writings, Lord Loughborough's speech in the House of Lords on the Alien Bill, Grenville's circular letter to local magistrates, and the lord president's anti-Jacobin address "in the Name of the Court, Magistrates, and Council of Edinburgh."⁶⁵ As the

⁶³ Association Papers, pt. 1, *Proceedings of the Association*, no. 1, p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pt. 1, no. 1, pp. 1, 3–5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pt. 1, no. 2, pp. 12–16, no. 4, pp. 10–15, no. 8, pp. 13–16, no. 9, pp. 1–8.

litany of official controls and sanctions grew, the rhetoric of association pamphleteering was sometimes reduced to the list of repressive authorities that could be gathered on a single title page, as, for example, in one eight-page tract circulated by the East-Kent and Canterbury Association in 1792: *Judge Ashhurst's Charge to the Grand Jury of Middlesex. II. Proclamation of May, 1792. III. Proclamation of Nov. 1792. IV. Lord Grenville's Circular Letter. V. Thanks of the Common Council of London, To the Lord Mayor. VI. Resolutions of the Corporation of London.*⁶⁶

This kind of publication made legal sanction an intrinsic feature of print expression, rather than its mere external limit, in ways that have important interpretive consequences. Historians have disagreed over the extent to which the association actually waged, rather than threatened, a legal campaign against the radical press, and the recent tendency to align the movement with broad public support has corresponded with efforts to distance it from the courtroom, on the grounds that prosecutions were relatively infrequent and limited in their impact. Yet as Philp observes, it may be enough that the law was sometimes used against the radical press: "Scholars who have insisted upon the relatively moderate scale of prosecutions of radicals miss the point that loyalists' arguments about the limits of legitimate discourse *were* backed up by sanctions—without those sanctions their claims would have been little more than sound and fury."⁶⁷ The point is reinforced by the facility with which evidence of legal sanction was put before the reading public, in order to reinforce and amplify its effect. The printed version of *Mr. Justice Ashhurst's Charge* entered the association catalog along with *A Protest against T. Paine's Rights of Man* and *Short Hints upon Levelling*, but it could be recommended beyond these ordinary polemics because it breathed "the SPIRIT of the ENGLISH LAW" and was therefore "well suited to CURB the LICENTIOUS SPIRIT of the TIMES."⁶⁸ If in principle the association did invite ordinary subjects to join a national conversation about politics, those subjects immediately confronted the intimidating premise that public "cognisance" of the "Executive and Legislative Authorities of the State" was "irregular" and therefore illegitimate. They then found themselves in a political arena that was collaboratively orga-

⁶⁶ This title page is reproduced in *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. Gregory Claeys, 8 vols. (London, 1995), 7:213; for details about its publication, see 7:215.

⁶⁷ Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism," p. 57; see also Mitchell, "The Association Movement," p. 70, for evidence of how the intimidation of booksellers and publicans allowed the association movement to achieve "many notable successes without ever having recourse to prosecution." For an account of the 1790s that shifts attention away from prosecution, see Clive Emsley, "Repression, 'Terror' and the Rule of Law in England during the Decade of the French Revolution," *English Historical Review* 100 (1985): 801–25.

⁶⁸ Association Papers, pt. 1, no. 1, p. 1.

nized by the government, closely integrated with its purposes, and saturated with evidence of legal limits on expression—that is, as far as can be imagined from “the state of confrontation between government and the press” that Jürgen Habermas has theorized for the classical public sphere of the early eighteenth century.⁶⁹

The association’s preference for government initiative over voluntary enterprise did not entirely subvert the collaborative structure of loyalism. By facilitating state intervention in the political public sphere, Reeves and his colleagues ingratiated themselves with the ministry and established networks of mutual reinforcement that implicitly advanced the claims of public opinion on the political process. This was powerfully brought home by Ashhurst in a subsequent grand jury charge, which called the work of the association in evidence to support his own judicial proceedings. With his earlier charge already in print, urging readers to follow jury guidelines, Ashhurst pressed ahead by instructing jurors to “persevere in the same line of conduct” pursued by the loyalist press: “The zeal and spirit which has been shewn by the different societies in this metropolis, has warmed and pervaded the most distant parts of this kingdom; and the several useful publications which have been dispersed abroad, have enlightened the deluded minds of the lower classes of the people, which had been deceived and practiced upon by the diabolical artifices of crafty and designing men.”⁷⁰ As the judge warmed to his task, the charge became a formal defense of loyalism against those who discovered a threat to British liberty in the systematic campaign against radical expression. Unwilling to let this endorsement languish in a courtroom, the London Association completed the circuit of collaboration when it brought out a pamphlet version of the charge.

By locating itself at the critical intersection of public assembly, print expression, and state power, the association became—in its own assessment—a semiofficial organ of political legitimation. This was signaled in Ashhurst’s judicial commendation and then reinforced in June 1793 with the appearance of the full archive of *Association Papers* in a format that drew crucial distinctions within the printed record. The most authoritative pamphlets appeared in a first part, “Publications Printed by Special Order of the Society”; these included extracts from sermons, courtroom charges, and parliamentary speeches, as well as historical material from Lord Bolingbroke and Soame Jenyns. Less fully sanctioned works were bound in a second part, containing “A Collection of Tracts, Printed at

⁶⁹ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 27, 60.

⁷⁰ *Association Papers*, pt. 1, no. 7, pp. 2–4.

the Expence of [the] Society.’’ The distinction accorded with the association’s hierarchical ordering of political opinion and with its elite sense of responsibility for managing the emergence and development of vernacular political sentiment. *Reasons for Contentment* was among the few works addressed to ordinary readers that made its way into the fully sanctioned first part of the collected papers, reinforcing the importance of Paley’s epistemology of popular discontent. A number of more widely reprinted tracts, including More’s *Village Politics* and William Jones’s ‘‘John Bull’’ letters, were not similarly privileged. The subordinate second part of the collection served as a grab bag for pseudopopular ballads like ‘‘King and Constitution,’’ ‘‘The Happy Man,’’ and ‘‘The Revolution Quack,’’ and for vernacular dialogues that endlessly restaged Paley’s vexed encounter between rich and poor.

Despite their secondary position within the printed record, these demotic tracts offer perhaps the clearest record of the range of public deliberation and the depth of political consciousness that the association was prepared to grant ordinary subjects. Yet commentators have disagreed about what this record means. In *The Politics of Language*, Olivia Smith argues that the association’s pervasive ‘‘anti-intellectualism’’ lowered the tone of political debate for a generation, stifling the example of Paine’s ambitious vernacular until popular radical fortunes revived during the later phases of the Napoleonic wars: ‘‘It was not only radical ideas which the Association wanted to keep from its readers but also any type of political thinking.’’⁷¹ In challenging this kind of wholesale critique, Philp finds that the transgressive possibilities of vulgar conservatism were most fully realized in ‘‘the rhetorical complexities and ambiguities of the dialogue form’’ as it was deployed by the association. Dialogue tracts for ordinary readers become ‘‘instructive instances of the difficulties of characterizing the voice of the labouring man, and of the costs of doing so successfully,’’ since a reactionary conversation across class lines involved a ‘‘simultaneous appeal to, and exclusion of, members of the lower orders.’’⁷² The point is characteristically shrewd and again suggests that the course of political discussion in the 1790s may represent something other than a stifling anti-Paineite consensus. Yet the list of reactionary dialogues that betray a measure of complexity turns out to be disappointingly thin. The credible characterization and vigorous argument of More’s *Village Politics* make it a paradigmatic instance of rhetorical complexity, but Philp concedes that More’s treatment of a dis-

⁷¹ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791–1819* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 71, 76–77.

⁷² Philp, ‘‘Vulgar Conservatism,’’ pp. 62–63.

cussion between two laboring men is exceptional.⁷³ The more common practice was to reinforce hierarchy by representing vertical interchange, as in *The Labourer and the Gentleman* or *A Dialogue between Mr. T—, a Tradesman in the City, and his Porter, John W—*. These transparent fantasies of elite intervention in plebeian politics prefer a facile rhetoric of assent to genuine deliberation across class lines. While not devoid of Paley's interest in framing public conditions, such dialogues tend to reduce those conditions to the inexorable force of national prejudice and class deference.

In *The Labourer and the Gentleman*, for example, the plebeian figure John has been exposed to "the Rights of Men" by a shadowy stranger, whose anonymity figures two related conservative anxieties: the conspiratorial designs of English Jacobin culture and the dislocated abstraction of a print public sphere. The Gentleman interlocutor enforces loyalty in part by reminding John that, while "you know nothing of that fine spoken gentleman" nor the source of his radical pamphlets, "you and I have known one another many years." The rhetorical ironies of conservative address are clear, since this appeal to local feeling takes place within a nationally distributed pamphlet, one that was made available to regional association affiliates without regard to local circumstance. And the fact that *The Labourer and the Gentleman* has no particular readerly design manifests itself in the formulaic concessions ("Yes, Master," "No Master, to be sure not," "Why that's true, Master," "Right, Master") that lead up to the chastened laborer's inevitable conversion: "Good day, Master, and thank you for all you have said, which has made me quite easy again."⁷⁴ Dialogue degenerates into catechism, as a stock type voluntarily exchanges his own deluded Jacobinism for "all you have said." As it happens, the association did include two catechisms in its catalog, and the rhetorical and intellectual limits of these tracts ("Q. Do you possess . . . Liberty. A. I do") confirm a tendency to reduce political debate to the crude formula of elite prescription and popular assent.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid., p. 63. I take up the case of More and the Cheap Repository Tracts more fully in "'Study to Be Quiet': Hannah More and the Invention of Conservative Culture in Britain," *ELH*, forthcoming.

⁷⁴ Association Papers, pt. 2, no. 3, pp. 8–12.

⁷⁵ See *The Englishman's Political Catechism* and *The English Freeholder's Catechism*, in *Association Papers*, pt. 2, no. 3, pp. 13–15, no. 10, pp. 1–8. The former tract was adapted from Lord Bolingbroke's *The Freeholder's Political Catechism* (London, 1733). Gary Kelly has made the point about a reversion from dialogue to catechism with respect to More's Cheap Repository Tracts, in "Revolution, Reaction, and the Expropriation of Popular Culture: Hannah More's *Cheap Repository*," *Man and Nature/L'Homme et La Nature* 6 (1987): 152. For a suggestive treatment of the authority of a catechistic method within late eighteenth-century educational practices, see Alan Richardson, *Litera-*

This is not to say that the smooth course of loyalist interchange was never interrupted. On the contrary, efforts to control Paley's "reflecting husbandman or artificer" did generate vigorous gestures of exclusion or silencing, and where these gestures exceeded the straightened form of the catechism, they further undermined any account of popular contentment as the result of considered political deliberation. Interestingly, serious interruptions tend to occur when these tracts try to represent their own transmission and reception.

The narrator and putative author of *Poor Richard; Or, The Way to Content in These Troublesome Times* identifies himself as "an old man, and . . . formerly an Almanack-maker," an occupation that clearly gestures back toward the expectations of a pre-Jacobin print culture:⁷⁶ "[I have] in the course of my business . . . calculated many Eclipses and Comets, and other strange Revolutions of the Skies; but I must fairly own that many most extraordinary events have happened lately upon this our Planet the Earth, that were far beyond my abilities to calculate, or, I believe, those of the shrewdest Almanack-maker in the trade." The reserved millennial announcement of the subtitle ("The Way to Content in These Troublesome Times") only hints at the unsettled print forms that might supplant the almanac and its maker. There is a more decisive break from the past in the setting of *Poor Richard*: an ordinary "public-house" of the 1790s, with "ten or twelve people sitting round a table on one side of the room . . . conversing upon the late transactions of France, and the state of things in this country." Within this prototypical arena of revolutionary sociability, the narrator sets about ordering "a sober pint of porter" and "reading the newspaper that lay before [him]," but then finds himself distracted from this routine by an extraordinary conversation "upon a public subject." One young man, "more ignorant as well as more petulant than the rest," issues an "intemperate" defense of the French Revolution, and the manifest "disapprobation of the rest of the company" nearly yields a credible treatment of political exchange within a vividly realized setting. Before this can happen, however, the episode is "interrupted" by "a plain neat old man with white locks," who decisively repudiates Jacobin principle. A barrage of Ben Franklin's proverbial wisdom replaces tavern dialogue, with interchange reduced to

ture, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 64–77.

⁷⁶ For Burke's use of the almanac in order to expose the new and more volatile conditions of revolutionary era publicity, see my "Burke, Popular Opinion, and the Problem of a Counter-Revolutionary Public Sphere," in *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. John Whale (Manchester, 2000), pp. 107–8.

the spurious form of an anticipated objection: “Methinks I hear some of you say . . .” The deterioration of dialogue into monologue is formally registered in the way the main body of the tract, the old man’s uninterrupted speech, unfolds within a continuous sequence of single quotation marks. The final paragraph offers little more than a perfunctory return to the framing drama: “Thus the old Gentleman ended his harangue.—The rest of the company applauded his doctrine, and the young man to whom in particular it was addressed, seemed much abashed, and soon took his hat and left the room—I hope much edified with what he had heard.”⁷⁷ The closing gesture is entirely characteristic of association discourse. Loyalist principle emerges rhetorically as a venerable pronouncement, which delineates the ordinary subject as a listener, who is entitled to just two responses: enthusiastic assent or silent and abashed departure.

Other tracts suggest how political interchange could be further undermined by irregular versions of the coercive authority embodied in Ashhurst and the published charge. Jones provides a useful case study of this effect, since his “John Bull” series exemplified the loyalist interest in prevailing modalities of expression: irregularly serial, sponsored by clubs and associations, and cast as a political correspondence, these tracts were often brought out in broadsheet format to facilitate street distribution and display. In *One-Penny Worth More, or, A Second Letter from Thomas Bull to his Brother John*, the rootless tavern demagogue of *Poor Richard* returns in the more cynical form of “one of those Fellows who are hired to go about with *Tom Pain’s Books*.” He is readily silenced but not without a clear warning that native resistance to alien radical opinion is prepared to exceed verbal force. Had this “London Rider” dared to produce any portion of his radical library, “we should have put them into a *Pitch-Kettle*, and stirred them about well, and then burned the Pitch and Books together.” Having exposed the hazards of tavern sociability for radicals and reactionaries alike, the tract goes on to imagine a more controlled arena for distributing political opinion. Our correspondent, Thomas Bull, recommends the practice of a local minister who “takes us all now and then, rich and poor, to dine with him” and allows ordinary conversation “about common Things” to unfold until, with a loud “Rap upon the Table,” he enforces “Attention” and unleashes the real business at hand, a spirited anti-Jacobin harangue.⁷⁸ If these local gestures of interruption, enforced silence, and threatened violence served to undermine dialogue, they also reinforced the association’s

⁷⁷ Association Papers, pt. 2, no. 12, pp. 12–13, 16, 20.

⁷⁸ [William Jones,] *One Penny-Worth More, or, A Second Letter from Thomas Bull to His Brother John* (London, [1792]), unpaginated broadsheet tract.

commitment to a political field that referred every public sentiment back to its “only true center,” the “Executive and Legislative Authorities of the State.” Attempts to represent reactionary argument within a recognizable social space were therefore consistent with broader association strategies. Transferring discussion from the tavern to the vicarage facilitated state supervision, just as the threat of “Pitch and Books” burned together vividly extended the coercive force of the courtroom charge or royal proclamation into the more violent fringes of the “Church and King” mob.

Yet as the effort to align public opinion with state authority worked its way through loyalist discourse, difficulties arose, particularly where the collaborative enterprise envisioned by Reeves and his allies suggested that some portion of antirevolutionary agency might pass from the state into the less predictable arena of public opinion. This kind of reciprocity opened reactionary enterprise to corrosive radical scrutiny. Court proceedings against the radical press triggered an especially spirited public debate, in part because they allowed antagonists of the government, otherwise vulnerable to charges of disloyalty, to invoke English libertarian traditions on their own behalf. Critics complained that loyalism enforced a perilously broad understanding of sedition and exceeded normal traditions of civic association for the purpose of criminal prosecution.⁷⁹ What is striking about this kind of criticism is that it issued in a formal counter-association, the Friends to the Liberty of the Press, organized by Thomas Erskine (the celebrated defense attorney for Paine and Thomas Hardy) at a series of London meetings in December 1792. In some respects, this was an unimpressive organization, a “brief and futile effort to challenge Reeves” that dissolved under the twin pressures of external repression and internal dissension.⁸⁰ Yet the Friends to the Liberty of the Press was able to launch a vigorous if short-lived print campaign against the association, the force of which was attested to by the equally vigorous loyalist response.⁸¹ Here reactionary activism did not mark the outer limit of public debate but instead became one link in a serial logic of political organization and expression. In this sense, the association offers a paradigmatic instance of the “principle of disseminatory limitation” that Alan Liu has developed to describe the treason trials of the 1790s. In Liu’s account,

⁷⁹ For a careful study of this tradition, see David Philips, “Good Men to Associate and Bad Men to Conspire: Associations for the Prosecution of Felons in England, 1760–1860,” in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750–1850*, ed. Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (Oxford, 1989), pp. 113–70.

⁸⁰ See Black, *The Association*, pp. 253–55; Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty*, pp. 273–74.

⁸¹ Some of these pamphlets have been collected in *The Friends to the Liberty of the Press: Eight Tracts, 1792–1793*, ed. Stephen Parks (New York and London, 1974).

meant to challenge containment as a model for discursive power, the radicals and reactionaries of the 1790s were engaged in “limitary contests of legitimation” that did not simply define subversion but instead allowed its diverse forms to be played out in an “open system” that crossed political boundaries and extended through a number of discursive arenas—print, law, assembly, opinion.⁸² The association’s ironic origins as state-sponsored counterassociation were therefore reiterated in its counterattack on the Friends to the Liberty of the Press: loyalists engineered the defeat of an organization they had called into being.

Where this dialectical framework became explicit, political differences tended to be more closely argued, restoring the kind of theoretical self-consciousness that characterized Paley’s *Reasons for Contentment*. In their preliminary resolutions, the Friends to the Liberty of the Press defined sedition narrowly as “a design to excite the People to resist the Civil Magistrate” and insisted that the government was adequately “entrusted with powers” to prosecute any such challenge. This approach was calculated to undermine the founding principles of loyalism: “We have therefore seen with uneasiness and alarm the formation of certain societies, which, under the pretence of supporting the executive magistrate, and defending the Government against sedition, have held out general terrors against the circulation of writings, which without describing them, they term seditious; and entered into subscriptions for the maintenance of prosecutions against them; a proceeding doubtful as to its legality, unconstitutional in its principle, oppressive in its operation, and destructive of the Liberty of the Press.”⁸³ In *An Answer to the Declaration of the Persons Calling Themselves, Friends of the Liberty of the Press* (1793), John Bowles vigorously defended the association’s understanding of the relationship between public opinion and state authority and rejected the notion that “the power of accusation against offenders who have violated the laws is confined to the supreme executive magistrate.” On the contrary, according to Bowles, not only did “every individual, . . . in his private capacity, and in the character of a prosecutor,” have the right “to call for the execution of the laws upon those who have violated them,” but “the executive power” had a reciprocal duty “to lend its agency to every one who demands it in the pursuit of so important an object.”⁸⁴ This prosecutorial circuit, leading out from an offended

⁸² Alan Liu, “Wordsworth and Subversion, 1793–1804: Trying Cultural Criticism,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2 (1989): 68–69.

⁸³ The Resolutions of the First Meeting of the Friends to the Liberty of the Press (London, 1793), p. 4.

⁸⁴ Association Papers, pt. 1, no. 4, p. 2. Bowles had immediate reasons for aligning private initiative with government policy in this way, since like many association pam-

private individual through the state and back to an offending private individual, was not only permitted by the constitution, it was positively enjoined by the crime of sedition, which had (according to Bowles) the peculiar effect of restraining vigorous state initiative by making the state an interested party in any criminal case. Where the offense seemed “more immediately leveled at the government of a country,” the appropriate response was a “train of prosecution” initiated by those who are “unconnected with the offices of government.”⁸⁵ As in the Crown and Anchor meetings that first organized loyalist sentiment, the sphere of voluntary civic enterprise is conceived as a collaborative arena where repressive “agency” circulates back and forth between individual subjects and the state. Far from allowing that this might compromise loyalist opinion, Bowles claimed that association support for the government was the purest form of public expression: “The general, spontaneous, and independent voice of the people has been expressed with a fervour and an unanimity beyond the example of any former period.”⁸⁶ Yet the “independent” status of this voice accords uneasily with the provisional manner in which loyalism was first theorized as a regrettable “counterpoise” to radical transgression, suggesting that *An Answer* had become, through the dialectics of countersedition, both a defense and a revisionist extension of the association’s founding principles. Bowles’s unusually detailed account of the conditions for civic enterprise implies that, in times of crisis, the state cannot do without the assistance of those who are “the most unconnected with the offices of government.” A radical challenge winds up advancing the authority of public opinion in loyalist form. Yet any new legitimization of civic enterprise still takes place within established limits. Bowles vigorously reinforces the association’s tendency to locate free expression in repression, since “the people” discover their “independent voice” in a demand “for the execution of the laws” against radical protest.

It is worth returning by way of conclusion to the figure of theater with which I opened this article, in order to consider again the appearance of *Reasons for Contentment* in the catalog of *Association Papers*. If Paley emerges in my analysis as an unusually close theorist of his own rhetorical enterprise, the association should be understood as a further frame on that enterprise and specifically, on the network of social relations mapped in Paley’s idyll of antirevolutionary contentment. Beyond the spectacle of cottage life, beyond the elite spectator’s observable envy,

phleteers he held an official position in the government and was also secretly paid for his work. See Mitchell, “The Association Movement,” p. 59.

⁸⁵ Association Papers, pt. 1, no. 4, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 4, 8.

and beyond Paley's own deployment of this kaleidoscopic spectacle for the benefit of the common reader, the association worked to organize and police the terms within which reasoning about popular contentment, for ordinary readers, entered the discourse of public life. Just as his dramatic figure lost sight of events on stage in its concern for audience relations, so Paley never really considered the contours of his theatrical polity. It was left to Reeves and the founders of the association, acting in concert with the government, to organize the arena within which "the Labouring Part of the British Public" would be permitted to achieve political self-awareness. If the typical loyalist pamphlet was less ambitious than Paley's *Reasons for Contentment*, this was in part because the association had effectively separated out his simultaneous act of addressing the poor and managing the terms in which that address took effect. Reeves did not expect to accomplish what Paley deemed impossible, the suppression of political feeling among ordinary subjects, and historiographical debates about his effectiveness tend to founder on the counterfactual he helped ordain: a revolution that never took place. Yet by restricting radical argument and radical organization and by making pamphlet evidence of that restriction part of the public record, the association guaranteed that the experience of coming to politics in the 1790s involved bearing extensive witness to the repressive authority of the state. If *Reasons for Contentment* flattered its ordinary readers by rhetorically incorporating them into a politically relevant "British Public," those same readers learned from pamphlets like *Mr. Justice Ashhurst's Charge* the fate of those who did not find reason enough for contentment.